

INTEGRITY is published each month and seeks to encourage all believers in Christ to strive to be one, to be pure, and to be honest and sincere in word and in deed, among themselves and toward all men.

Integrity

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On Our Knees!

When I moved to a new church some years ago, I found some folks who strongly objected to having dinner in the church building. Their reasons were religious rather than dietary; they believed that the act of eating dinner somehow violated the sanctuary. I tried to respect their viewpoint, but their unhesitating use of the rest rooms made it hard for me to do so.

Church dinners, or potlucks, have survived such opposition because they are recognized as a good thing. Still they are somewhat tainted in the minds of many and therefore cannot quite be restored to their important place in the

primitive church. The early saints, so the evidence indicates, regularly ate the Lord's supper in connection with a larger meal. But when our forefathers moved the communion from the dinner table to the altar, and made a sacrifice out of a fellowship meal, the church dinner dropped out of the liturgy.

We still have not recovered from that mistake. We still eat together much too timidly. We are afraid to see our meals together as an act of worship. It is now time to correct our course. In the words of the familiar song, "Let us break bread together *on our knees.*" —HGL

OCTOBER-NOVEMBER, 1980

Integrity

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Free to Stay Home

The frequent references to freedom in this issue have reminded me of the so-called Parable of the Prodigal Son, which so beautifully reveals the very heart of the gospel that one wonders why we do not see more written on it. It's a fantastic story, one that many Christians find hard to believe because its main character (the father, not the son) is incredibly generous. Too generous, we think, to be a picture of God.

We all know the story — how the waiting father spotted the returning son at a distance, ran and embraced him, and then threw a big party. And we like to think of God in such terms. But we are really bothered by the fact that no conditions were attached to this eager acceptance. The son was not allowed to finish his rehearsed confession. He was assigned no works of penance. He was issued no warnings. He was required to give no surety that he would not run away again. We see this as a "carelessness" on the father's part, which not only slights the rigidly righteous elder brother, but actually encourages sin. But is it?

If Jesus had continued the story, would the son have left home again? I seriously doubt it. He knew — as neither he nor his brother had known before — forgiving love, and that love would keep him nailed to his father's home even when work on the farm got boring (or did it ever?) and when old lusts were rekindled. For the first time in his life he was free.

Free indeed. The word free is from an old root meaning "to love." The free ones are the loved ones, as opposed to the slaves. When one knows God's love and belongs to his family, he is free. He needs no escape. He does not yearn to run away. Love works when nothing else will. We should remember that when we are tempted to dally with legalism. —HGL

Freedom to Be Servants

K.M. LE FEVER

New Bedford, New York

In his first letter Peter admonishes us to "live as free men, yet without using your freedom as a pretext for evil: but live as servants of God." Live as free men! Thus Peter sums up all that he had to say about Christian life. It may come as a surprise to those for whom the faith seems to be nothing but a set of restrictions to hear that the Christian's real destiny is freedom. And, yet, this is the heart and the center of the Christian message: live as free men. In fact, the first recorded sermon of Jesus was from the text:

"The spirit of the Lord is upon me to preach the gospel to the poor: to preach deliverance to the captives . . ."

Meanwhile, his word to the men of his day was: "You shall know the truth: and the truth shall make you free." This was the sign of the gospel at work in lives like ours. A new freedom was abroad. "Where the spirit of the Lord is," said Paul, "there is liberty."

Today, it is always possible to talk at length about liberty and freedom in resounding abstractions and acceptable clichés. Every celebration of our national independence makes this temptation almost irresistible. But we're living in a period of so much verbal inflation that anyone who speaks of freedom almost has to define his

terms. When I hear the words "live as free men" today, I need to know who is saying it, what his idea of freedom is, what his propelling self-interest may be. It might be a Freudian telling me to get rid of my religious inhibitions. It could be a Christian Scientist saying that evil and pain are the bondage produced by wrong thinking. It might be a civil rights worker speaking to Negroes in Mississippi. It may be George Wallace talking about freedom under his definition of law and order. It could be an ultra-conservative telling me that his property rights come before my human rights. It might be an anarchist telling me that his human rights come before my property rights. It could be Billy Graham calling me for a decision for Christ. It might be Mao Tse-Tung selling Communism to a new African state. It might be a reformer advocating the elimination of pornography or a student demanding the right either of filthy speech or participatory democracy. It could even be a member of the National Rifle Association interpreting the constitution according to the simple principle of self-interest. What a host of conflicting interpretations lie behind this appeal in our generation — live as free men. All we do know at times is the foggy assurance that my freedom ends where

your nose begins, that where freedom is concerned, your freedom may be my hell — and my freedom your hell.

A Danger Today

Are we to take a cynical stance, therefore, and assume that all talk of freedom is to be distrusted? One of the dangers of current inflationary speech is to abandon responsible dialogue simply because definitions are bandied about in all kinds of confusion contexts. Just because “peace,” for example, is given all kinds of meanings, including that of armed aggression, so that “peace-loving” and “fighters for peace” have become sinister sounds in our ears, there is no reason to give up the search for peace among men. “Love” is another word that can be used in a hundred different senses, but only a cynic would conclude, therefore, that there is no such thing. We have learned to be wary about the words “freedom” and “liberty” in the speeches and manifestoes of our day, but we know very well that there is a true freedom to be sought and cherished. Whatever reservations we may have about the liberties we enjoy, who can deny that there is a difference between living in a society where we can stand up and publicly disagree, and one where such action brings immediate reprisal, whether from individuals or the state? Besides, whatever confusion may be in our minds about the nature of inward freedom, you and I can still recognize in certain men and women whom we know a quality of integrity and self-possession that marks them off from those who live in major or minor bondage to prevailing opinion, social custom, inner frustration or guilty conscience.

Will you consider, therefore, what Peter had in mind when he said, “Live as free men . . . live as servants of God.” Note, if you will, that the two phrases are carefully conjoined. To be free, he says, is to be a servant; to be a servant is freedom. And it isn’t simply Peter who talks like this. If we’re confused by the conflicting ideas of freedom that are presented to us today, we might be ready to hear again the steady, consistent, and obviously paradoxical testimony of the Bible that man’s true freedom lies in his submission to the will of God “in whose service is perfect freedom,” according to a classic prayer. It is the freedom of responsible obedience — to be what God created us to be — servants of his. Sure, we know by now that freedom requires an atmosphere in which it develops, a climate or condition in which it becomes possible. But whatever level or maturity this freedom attains, it can never be defined as your or my unrestricted right to do whatever we may choose. Imagine a family in which every member exerted a right to act without any thought of the rights of others. The result would be anarchy, a chaos in which any real freedom would become impossible. True freedom in a family is only experienced as there is a common submission to the discipline of family love.

But it isn’t only a question of respecting the freedom of others. Each of us knows that there’s no real freedom in being left alone with our autonomous choices, in being the absolute lord and master of our lives. You do not make a child free by withdrawing from him every kind of authority and restraint. He finds his freedom in the atmosphere of order, within the conditions imposed on him by a love he does not yet fully

understand. As growth continues, adolescence means the gradual replacing of parental authority. Meanwhile, even youth does not find freedom in the mere rejection of restraint, but in the personal acceptance of an authority that is freely chosen. None of us in maturity can know real freedom in the rejection of all authority, with each man going about, as the hippies say, either believing or doing his own thing. The man who is his own God, or the slave of a false god, is ultimately the slave of passions he despises, of convictions disclosing his insecurity, of habits he longs to break, of whims and follies he cannot control. And so the most truly free men and women we’ve known are those whose lives are surrendered to the God and Father of Jesus Christ who keeps saying over and over again, “This is why you were born: to be my servant and this — here today and there tomorrow — is what you’re to do about it.” The Bible sets this inescapable truth before us in the plainest language: “Live as free men . . . live as servants of God.”

The Biblical Drama

The books of the Bible are, in one sense, the drama of man’s freedom. The prologue shows us man as God intends him to be — a son of God, made in his image, sharing in the freedom of the Creator-spirit, with a whole world to explore and enjoy; but the atmosphere of that freedom is clearly defined. God remains God, and man owes him obedience. The condition of his freedom is symbolized by the tree of which he may not eat. But the spirit of bondage in the form of a serpent says, “Eat, and you shall be as gods.” Precisely. The rest of the Bible is the

unfolding of the contents of this mighty myth. It shows man’s enslavement, his involvement in the chains of his own devising even as he struggles to be free. As he explores the rich garden of this world, and feels his way toward the strange dominion he has been promised, enemies spring up on every side — nature, strangers, demonic powers, even his own kith and kin seek his enslavement. But into this terrible picture of fear, violence, injustice, warfare, superstition, and despair, which the Bible pictures with all the realism of a contemporary novel, comes the word of the living God, the call of freedom. Socially, in the context of history, the word first comes to an abject tribe of slaves, laboring on the great public works program of the Pharaohs of Egypt. “Let my people go.” Exodus. This is the key work of the Old Testament. It is God saying to mankind: “You are not meant to be slaves, inwardly or outwardly, there is a destiny for you beyond the bondage of your fellows or the shackles of your own soul. “Live as free men. Live as servants of God.”

Every commandment that burned its way into this people from their God, every prophet who thundered God’s righteousness, every poet who sang of the glory of the Lord, every wise man who labored over the sins and sufferings of man — all were calling man to his exodus, to get out from under the load of his self-imposed shackles and breathe the free air of the kingdom of God. And it was to this people, and from this people, that there was born the one to whom was given the name of Jesus, “for he shall save his people from their sins.” In this man the word of liberation was made flesh. For now men saw, and would see for centuries to

come, what it means to "live as free men."

Uniquely Free

This man, I say, was free, as no one else before or since. He moved through the tangled social and political conditions of his day with the freedom of one who was no man's pawn. He was utterly free from the entanglements of human possessions, free from the fears that enslave the human soul, free from any inward shame or guilt. And the secret of his freedom was wide open for all to see. What was it rooted in? Certainly not the freedom that rants and raves for freedom's sake in our culture. He was the servant of the living God, utterly and completely open and responsive to his will. His exodus upon the cross, with the words, "not my will, but thine, be done," was the act of the purest freedom ever done on earth. And, at the same time, it was the sovereign command to all the enslaving powers of mankind: let my people go. This was no mere demonstration, the miracle of the one free man. It was liberation, the offer to every man and woman of union with him in the "glorious liberty of the sons of Gods."

How do we practice this freedom today, and how much do we really know of it in his church? We may not really want it, if the truth be known, for it is a difficult and dangerous gift. Christians today are often like the Israelites who, you remember, on more than one occasion turned and cursed Moses, wanted to reverse the exodus, and hankered after the securities of slavery in Egypt. In the same way we tend to want our faith fed to us within the high walls of conventional mediocrity and institutional security. We want all of

the rules neatly packaged and the moral principles tightly conformed. We are slow to learn that the freedom that Christ confers is the constant enlargement of our horizons, the risking of thoughts we never entertained before, the celebration of our growing freedom under God and our humanness one toward another. In a word, Christ came with "deliverance to the captives," the freedom to talk and to walk across barriers, to meet our fellow men, whoever they are, without embarrassment, guilt, or fear. And, hence, to clasp every human hand with justice, integrity, and love.

How, then, do we live as free men amid the clamor of our world, with its surging claims and counter claims, its aspirations and its fears? Quite simply, in the light of the liberating gospel of Jesus Christ. We honor those who in the past and today fight for the rights of all men to live in conditions where they can express themselves without fear and exercise their God given rights; and we ask grace that we may have courage and wisdom to follow in their steps. Above all we see, in our daily communion with Christ the Lord, to know that inner freedom that he bestows — a freedom from the sins that enslave us; the fears that set up barriers; the insecurities that prompt silly bravado, easy rationalization, and comfortable self-justification; and, not least of all, a freedom for our unhampered growth into what Paul calls "the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." For remember: the God whom we worship is free, free with a freedom beyond our imaginings, free to make of people like you and me the servant-warriors of his rule on earth and the inheritors of heaven. So "live as free men . . . live as servants of God." □

Freedom

PETE NASH

Niles, Ohio

Freedom. The very mention of the word has called the patriot to action and involved the labor of countless hundreds of pens. It was for freedom that families kissed loved ones farewell and left for uncharted lands. It was for freedom that men fought for their country, the smell of blood and death burning in their nostrils. It was freedom that stirred the heart of slaves through a long and difficult struggle. Freedom. The pinnacle. The ultimate. The pearl of great price for man to treasure.

But freedom in religion? Religion is anything but free. The commandments of God are burdensome. His code of ethics is too demanding. Into a world shackled in its attempts at righteousness came the Christ. He did not come to bind man to new laws — He came to liberate! He came to set men free from the forces that bound him and separated him from his God.

Although the spirit of Christ breeds liberty, the spirit of the twentieth century religious establishment does not. The church of the Lord stands under the dominion of Christ. However, the Lordship of Christ has been replaced in far too many cases by the lordship of religious leaders.

One of the gravest dangers facing the people of God today is the loss of liberty. A man's relationship to God is judged by God and not by man. His Word guides and leads, but we as finite

beings cannot grasp Him in His fullness. We must be content with imperfect knowledge. Any man who claims total comprehension of the majesty of God has reduced God to man's image.

Today's "guardians of truth" are binding where God has not bound. It is an awesome responsibility to speak for God. It is a task that should not be taken lightly. It is a task that should emphasize truth — not the religious organization nor the authority of leadership. It is not the role of any man to limit the searchings of any other person nor to protect the church from the searchings of others. As Alexander Campbell said, "The heart and soul of all reformation is free discussion." Woe to anyone who would limit our cravings for truth and replace them with human bondage.

The aeon of slavery dwindled before His presence. The aeon of freedom burst into the first century like the first breath of spring. It was invigorating. It was liberating. It was freedom!

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The Meaning of Restoration

JOHN McCOOK

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

The end of the year rapidly approaches, and as the world takes another look at how much farther it has fallen and tries to wring new hope from a morbid self-infatuation, it is fitting for those of us who are in what is called the Restoration Movement in America to reflect further on the true meaning of *restoration*. Many misconceptions have sprung up through the years in connection with our movement, and the purpose of this article is just to make some (hopefully) simple observations about fundamental ideas which have motivated and formed it.

First of all, what is restoration? It seems a bit strange that our forefathers thought of their work as a *reformation* of the church, yet in time the movement began to refer to itself as one which attempted to *restore* the New Testament church. The new term begins to make sense when it is explained to us that the objective is to *restore* the principles of the New Testament in the faith and practice of the church, but it is all too easy for one to get the impression that for many centuries the true church of God did not exist on the earth — until someone came along and decided to restore it to life again; and such an idea, whether or not visible evidence would tend to support it, is in fundamental conflict with what the New Testament actually teaches.

For the writers of the New Testament, especially the apostle Paul,

the church was a constant before God. Their letters to the early churches reveal that there were already enormous differences in their beliefs and practices. Though at times Paul and others wrote to correct, discipline and encourage them, to them the church was always still the church, and much diversity of belief was tolerated. To them the church was made up of diverse, imperfect sinners who happened to have been redeemed by the grace of God, whether they all understood and appreciated it fully at the moment or not. The apostles' objective was not to *restore* the church in any sense of the word, for to them Jesus had already taken care of that on the cross. Rather, their purpose, aside from preaching the gospel to those who had not yet heard and believed, was to help *purify* the church.

The Biblical Concept

This observation ought to lead us to question the propriety of our actions, if not our motives, in attempting to "restore" the New Testament church. Also it gives us occasion to inquire again into the true Biblical concept of restoration.

No concept of any sort of spiritual restoration would be complete if considered apart from the context of the fall of man. From the Biblical story of the fall, we understand that the chief

element in the serpent's deception was this promise: "You will be like God, knowing (determining for yourself) good and evil." This is both Satan's and man's great sin, to presume to sit on the throne of God and be a law to themselves, to "know" what is good or evil according to what suits their purpose at the moment. And so we can safely say that Eve fell from oneness with God before she ever took a bite of the fruit, and all of creation subsequently became affected by her choice of a peculiar brand of self-determination.

Self-determination

This great sin of "self-determination" has been at the heart of many religious movements, and it was by no means absent from those that Jesus encountered among his own people. It is no secret that many of the Jews actually thought that they should be responsible for producing the Messiah, in the sense of "if we don't take control of the situation, who will? We can't afford to wait on God any longer." No matter how this type of attitude was expressed, whether in the brash manner of the Zealots or ever so subtly in the case of the Pharisees who could say one thing and mean just the opposite, the reality was that the Jews had, for the most part, lost contact with the personal Other, with God. Their attention was directed largely toward themselves and their own efforts to bring about the Messianic Age. They tried to assume a responsibility which God had not laid directly on them.

We of the Restoration Movement have run the risk of exactly the same sort of error. Who has commissioned us to usurp the authority of the Holy

Spirit and do his work for him? What is needed is a return to a more immediate contact with that Personal Other, the God who is eager to reveal himself to us, but who always remains distinct from us, even as he indwells us by His Spirit, just as I will always remain a person distinct from you, the reader of this article. Such a return will give us a renewed appreciation of the Lordship of Jesus Christ, who alone restores us to fellowship with God. We also need to re-evaluate our concepts of the Word of God, the Church of Jesus Christ, and ministry. I will deal with these three areas in turn, speaking of them in terms of *revelation*, *sanctification*, and *proclamation*. Then, after discussing our *conceptions*, I will go on to discuss our *visions* of the Kingdom of God.

As far as the Word of God is concerned, what I have to say here is not so much a contention for the authority of the Bible as for the things it talks about. I am concerned that we see the Word not so much as a book, but as a person, Jesus Christ, even as John writes, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The most basic definition of "word" is something which one person communicates to another. Jesus, then, is God's word to us, a fact to which the whole of the Bible was intended to testify. So again it creates misunderstanding to refer to the Bible as the Word of God; the Bible only serves to point out what the word of God is, and all that the word of God is. Fundamentally, then, the Word of God can only be understood in the context of the fall of man and the restoration God offers in Jesus Christ.

This is what really makes up the character of *revelation*. Revelation is

God's word to man. It is not always written in a book. In fact, revelation was always given in another form before it was ever written or recorded in a book. With this in mind, it is especially helpful to consider how the Angel of the Lord led the people of Israel through the years. A close study of the Old Testament indicates that this Angel of the Lord, or Messenger of Yahweh, was in fact the second person of the Trinity, Christ, because he was the messenger for God, yet accepted worship as God. He slowly led the people of Israel to understand what he was going to do for mankind on the cross, telling them the same thing repeatedly.

Miracles likewise are properly understood only as part of the revelation of God's redeeming and restoring action in Jesus. The miracle may actually be part of this redeeming and restoring process, as in the healing of someone's disease, but it always testifies to the Fatherhood of God and his redeeming, restoring love. In a Biblical miracle, God is always shown to be sovereign. There are false miracles, but these can be identified by looking to see just what it is they testify to.

Our Starting Point

To conclude what I am saying about revelation and the Word of God, it should be understood that the Bible, while it contains rules for our guidance, is not meant to serve primarily as a textbook in law, but is meant to bear witness to God's solution to our predicament due to sin (our separation from God, his creation, our fellow man, and ourselves). This is the heart of the revelation of God — a solution to a problem. This solution is our starting point, and with that in mind let us turn

to consider our conceptions regarding the Church of Jesus Christ.

We should always remember that the church exists, from first to last, as a result of the action of God. The church consists of all those who believe that Jesus died for the forgiveness of their sins. To acknowledge sin involves confession and repentance. However, the extent of sin's influence in one's own life is not always known, nor is one visibly able to overcome it all at once. The terms that God offers are very broad indeed. Jesus said, "All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away." This means to us that the *sanctification* or purification of the church depends in large measure upon the patience of God. From the point of view of our limited experience, this surely makes necessary a re-evaluation of the approach we might have taken toward predestination, the idea that those who will be saved or lost has been fixed from eternity of God. Predestination is only predestination because God knows something that we haven't found out yet, not because he has denied us the possibility of any truly free choice. And if God knows us well enough to say that we are predestined to spend eternity with Him, He is surely able to help us here and there along the way without violating that choice. However, one of the implications of predestination is that, far from becoming arrogant about being the very Elect of God, we should refrain from judging who is presently saved or lost on the basis of criteria which God does not use to judge their salvation Himself, even when it comes down to an issue as basic as baptism. While all of the Lord's commands are meant to be obeyed, to identify baptism as the point of salvation in an absolute

sense is to make it into a dead work of law, contradicting the grace it was meant to communicate.

These two things considered together (that is, the reality of the Word of God being an action on God's part toward us, together with the reality of the church as an entity totally dependent on the initiative of God) should lead us to a fresh approach to ministry. If we know that judgment is entirely in God's hands, then we are free simply to tell the story, knowing we will not be held responsible for what someone else does with the message God has given us to give to him. Because of this, we can conclude that the main ministry of the church consists of proclamation, telling the gospel or good news of Jesus Christ. It is my opinion that proclamation permeates everything that a born-again believer does; whether spoken or unspoken, all of his actions are, or should be, a proclamation to others of what he thinks of Jesus. This view of things is a lot simpler than we might expect or even desire, because it involves simply recognizing what God has done for us and said about us on the basis of his own action. There is no command to lift ourselves by our own bootstraps into heaven, but only to tell the story.

Some Questions

Having considered these three things — our conceptions of the Word, the Church, and ministry — let us conclude by asking ourselves a few questions about our vision of the Kingdom of God. Is the Kingdom of God a thing which is fully realized now in the church, or something to be expected in the future, or both? My contention is that it is both. The Kingdom of God is

present now in the lives of those who have accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior, yet there is a sense in which we still pray, "thy kingdom come," and look for the day when there will be no evidence of the work of Satan anywhere in sight. Jesus himself taught his disciples to look ahead for the kingdom as well, telling of general conditions toward the end and using parables, such as this: "Look at the fig tree and all of the trees. When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the Kingdom of God is near" (Luke 21:29-31).

Our resistance to a thorough consideration of passages like this is due, in large part, to our desire to still maintain control of the situation ourselves. We like to think we can continue on indefinitely living in the Kingdom of God according to the free enterprise ethic, and one day Messiah will come and rapture us off to spiritual never-never-land with no advance notice so that it won't hurt as much to be severed from our way of doing things. It is true that Jesus said that no man knows the hour, not even himself, but he has given us advance notice of the event and the conditions leading up to it. An acceptance of what he has told us about all these things demands that we give up all our pretensions to control the situation and accept the sovereignty of God in the matter. There is only so much he has called us to do. He has not called us to twist the world's arm to confess the name of Jesus, nor has he called us to rush the gates with a battering ram of pure peace. He has said simply, "Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the

vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me" (John 15:4).

In considering restoration and the Kingdom, two things need to be pointed out concerning the dominion of man. The first is that when God created mankind, he blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground." In other words, he gave man dominion over the earth. But man forfeited that dominion in the fall, and the best he has been able to do with it since then is an ugly self-centered thing. Yet that dominion is restored to us, at least in part, because of Jesus' death on the cross. The second point is in the form of a question: do you think that when the Son of Man returns in a cloud with power and great glory, he is going to disregard the work of his hands entirely and completely destroy it, or will he destroy what man has done to it and then review it? A proper theology of restoration must not overlook

What Counts

When Paul argued that "in Christ Jesus neither circumcision or uncircumcision is of any avail, but faith working through love," he made an extremely important statement concerning the fundamental nature of religion. What counts, he said, is a "faith which is effectively expressed in love" (so the original may be rendered). A clear understanding of this vital fact will do away with the worry that if we abandon legalism, we will leave life with no moral dynamic.

But Paul's statement is significant for another reason: it helps us to keep our bearings when we become preoccupied

passages such as Acts 3:21: "He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets."

I contend that one of the things which will be restored at that time is the dominion of man in all its fullness as it was meant to be, though obviously things will be a lot different from when there were only an innocent man and woman in a garden. At present man is still actively striving to enthrone himself, independent from God once for all. But the only way we can ever become "gods" is in submission to the Lordship of Christ, who said these words in defense of himself to the Jews who were upset with his claim to be the only Son of God: "Is it not written in your Law, 'I have said you are gods'? If he called them 'gods,' to whom the word of God came — and the scripture cannot be broken — what about the one whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world?" (John 10:34-36). □

with debates over how the church should worship and work. Of course, we think our controversies are important. But we should remember that, although the question of circumcision worries us very little, it was extremely important to some of Paul's contemporaries, who saw it as an essential element in God's "plan of salvation." But that was not what counted. What does count is love which effectively expresses faith in Christ. They were fighting over an issue rendered obsolete by what Christ did, and insisting on physical conditions that did not matter. Could we be doing the same thing? —HGL

Amused Christians

CHARLES R. GRESHAM

Grayson, Kentucky

Recently a term paper on Barton W. Stone was turned in to meet the requirements of a course on Restoration History at one of our colleges. In this paper there was this typographical (we shall be generous!) error:

It was not until after the Cane Ridge meeting that Stone became an amused [immersed is what was meant] Christian.

But what has every appearance of error is genuinely true. "Amused" means "to be pleasantly entertained." The verb "amuse" means "to cause to laugh or smile." Every Christian ought to be an amused Christian — one who can laugh or smile; one who is pleasantly entertained as he contemplates God's world of universe and persons and God's Word of truth and direction.

Barton Stone had labored long under the heavy load of Calvinism that was a part of his Presbyterian heritage. Later he would call it a "heavy clod" pressing upon the life of the Christian. The Cane Ridge meeting was the first clear light in the tunnel. He now saw God, not as a God of decrees, but of holy love, who wills all men to be saved and sends evidence of this love in many strange ways.

Amused? Pleasantly surprised? Indeed! So amused did Stone become that the course of his life was set. Others joined him in a happy crusade to

let this Holy God reveal His will through His written Word. That whimsical document we call the Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery reveals this amusement. Listen to the preamble:

The Presbytery of Springfield, sitting at Cane Ridge, in the county of Bourbon, being, through a gracious Providence in more than ordinary bodily health, growing in strength and size daily; and in perfect soundness and composure of mind; and knowing that it is appointed for all delegated bodies once to die; and considering that the life of every such body is very uncertain, do make and ordain this our last Will and Testament . . .

Following that preamble the first item continues to show this serious amusement:

We *will*, that this body die, be dissolved, and sink into union with the Body of Christ at large; for there is but one body, and one Spirit, even as we are called in one hope of our calling.

Other items follow this same vein:

We *will*, that the people henceforth take the Bible as the only sure guide to heaven; and as many as are offended with other books, which stand in competition with it, may cast them into the fire if they choose; for it is better to enter into life having one book, than having many to be cast into hell.

We will, that our weak brethren, who may have been wishing to make the Presbytery of Springfield their king, and wot not what is now become of it, betake themselves to the Rock of Ages, and follow Jesus for the future.

We will, that the Synod of Kentucky examine every member, who may be suspected of having departed from the Confession of Faith, and suspend every such suspected heretic immediately, in order that the oppressed may go free, and taste the sweets of Gospel liberty.

How "amused" are we in our

Christian faith and witness? Freedom brings this kind of pleasant and pleasurable entertainment. We stand in awe and wonder at what God has done and continues to do. We see a universe, marred certainly by man's sinfulness, but created for our good. We see the "image of God," imperfectly perhaps, but certainly, in those others of our fellows that we are in personal contact with. The Christian is the eternal optimist, because his realism is based upon the work of a Creator-God who can laugh and rejoice.

Amused Christians? May we see many more of them! □

To Elias Smith

"The Holy Scriptures are the only sure, authentic and infallible rule of faith and practice; the name Christian is the only proper one for the believer; in all essentials the Scriptures are plain to be understood; every Christian is free to examine the Scriptures for himself and to impartially judge of the sense and meaning of the same; every Christian has a right to publish and vindicate what he believes is contained in the Scriptures, and to serve God according to his own conscience."

— ELIAS SMITH

O Morning Star, who herald the ancient way,
And to New Hampshire brought the Gospel Light;
Who walked with bleeding feet the snow filled ways,
Till boots and socks were sogged with blood at night;
Who by the Word alone would governed be,
(But laid men's creeds and doctrines on the shelf);
And boldly said each Christian should be free
To read and judge its meaning for himself —
Sleep softly now and from your labors rest!

The trembling flame which first you lifted high,
Is now a star whose glory dims the sun;
Whose radiance fills the earth, the sea, the sky.
And lo, where once you preached the ancient way,
In all our far-flung Eastern hills today,
A thousand Churches stand where then was none.

— Don Reece

Help These Women

When the first missionaries invaded northern Greece, they found that the women in that area enjoyed considerable influence. At Thessalonica, for instance, "not a few prominent women" were persuaded by Paul's preaching and joined him and Silas. At Berea "a number of prominent Greek women" became believers. Paul's first message in Philippi was delivered to a congregation of women, one of whom was the notable Lydia. Even down at Athens, where converts were few, one of the two singled out for mention by name was a woman.

Women who were so numerous and of such distinction might be expected to have a powerful influence on the progress of the church (by the way, as far as we know, women in the Macedonian churches were never told to keep quiet), but they could also cause a great deal of damage if they assumed a sectarian attitude. This fact is reflected in the urgency of Paul's directions to the Philippians: "I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers . . ."

This passage (which some scholars cite as evidence of women preachers in Greece) is a good example of the "ministry of reconciliation" in progress. In the first place, Paul, from a distance, makes a direct appeal to the women to agree with each other in the Lord — an exhortation which must be interpreted in the light of Romans 14 and other Pauline passages which show that Paul never expected nor required total

uniformity of thought. What he is calling for here is a basic cooperation — a family spirit — which issues from a common acknowledgment of Jesus as Lord. He asks for unity, not uniformity. (I mention this because of the abuse to which this passage has been subjected by sectarians.)

The next phase of the reconciling ministry grows out of the recognition that the unity of the two women may be too much for them to accomplish alone, and involves a call for pastoral assistance from Paul's "loyal yokefellow," whom he urges to "help these women." And he reminds him that Euodia and Syntyche are not just two cantankerous busybodies of the sort who often find nothing better to do than stir up trouble, but that they had "contended at my side in the cause of the gospel," along with other notable evangelists.

The best of saints sometimes find themselves in a situation where they are inclined to stand apart from each other, even after they have fought battles ("contended") together for the Lord. At that point all of the resources of the brotherhood should be brought to bear upon the situation to bring about reconciliation. They should not be left to work things out by themselves, for they might not have the power to do so. To act in the interest of unity is not to meddle in other people's business, nor is it to lord it over another's faith (if we show apostolic restraint). On the contrary, it is to fulfill our responsibility as the body of Christ, which has been given the "ministry of reconciliation." "Help these women" is a word to us, too, although neither sex has a corner on disharmony. —HGL